Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2012
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe, log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #1431 08/10/12

~ FTC, Facebook Settle! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Atari 2600 at 40!
~ New Xbox on the Way! ~ Google Privacy Fines! ~ HP's Record Losses!
~ 4-Day Xbox Marathon! ~ Gaming Gesture Control ~ Pizza & Obamacare?

~ ~ New iMac and Mac Pro? ~

-* Facebook: 'Like' Free Speech *-
-* New Computer Virus Prowling Mideast *-
-* Oz Police Chief Attacks Violent Video Games *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, we're sitting here in Massachusetts with a tornado watch going on for a few more hours. Last word was one was closing in on the area in southeastern Massachusetts that was hit hard a year ago. We're keeping an eye on the television screen watching to make sure no similar storms erupt near our immediate area!

I may have mentioned this at some other time, bit I'll mention it again. I have absolutely no interest in "social" media - sites like Facebook and Twitter. As far as I'm concerned, they're all a massive waste of time and effort! In a word, stupid.

Yes, that's my opinion and I'm sticking to it. Which leads me to my main focus: personal opinion and freedom of speech. As you may have recently heard on the news lately, there's been some flak regarding the opinions of Chick-fil-A'a CEO and his views on same-sex marriage. The comments made the internet, and Twitter followers were "tweeting" their comments everywhere, pro and con. Rallies for and against occurred at C-F-A restaurants across the country. Opinions have been discussed online for awhile now. Who knows where it will all lead, but it seems that "social" media is keeping the thoughts alive.

Now the latest brouhaha is about pizza and Obamacare. That's right, pizza. Papa John's CEO has stated that Obamacare would raise the price of pizza a little bit. And the battle in the world of social media is once again raging.

In my opinion, these two CEOs have the right to their own opinions and the right to express them. I can agree with them, or not. Personally, I think these opinions are to garner publicity (the jury is still out on how that will turn out) for their businesses. Each to his own, I guess.

The point is the impact of social media with just about anything these days. Technology today allows immediate access to the views of millions. Remember when radio and television had the same impact? The difference today is that anyone can voice an opinion; and we really have no idea who is "speaking". The internet is essentially anonymous, and anyone can log into Facebook and Twitter and start all kinds of discussions. And people read this stuff and immediately formulate opinions, and react. And as many have opined, if it's on the internet, it must be true. Balderdash! What do you think?

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

->In This Week’s Gaming Section - New Xbox on the Way!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Gesture Control!
The Atari 2600 at 40!
And much more!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

New Xbox on the Way

A perfectly normal discussion about the merits of Hotmail’s relaunched service contained the first public confirmation that a new Xbox is on the way.

Speaking on the The Verge’s August 3 podcast, General Manager Brian Hall said that Hotmail’s transition into Outlook.com came "right in time for the new wave of products that we have coming out, with Windows 8, with the new version of Office, with the new Windows Phone and the new Xbox."

Though it’s not the grand unveiling that Microsoft is undoubtedly working towards, the accidental confirmation - picked up on by game and tech blog WeGotLife - shows that the next Xbox is an everyday reality for the Redmond, Washington, company.

The console’s codename had previously been outed as Durango, with Microsoft priming third-party developers early in 2012, and it’s expected to launch late 2013.

Of the other products mentioned by Hall, Windows 8 has its official release on October 26, 2012, Windows Phone 8 has been rumored for launch on selected devices as early as October or November 2012, and Microsoft’s Office 2013 suite of applications should arrive in the first half of 2013.

The PlayStation 4 console, also currently known by the name Orbis, is thought to be on track for announcement the same year; Nintendo’s Wii U is due late 2012, PC-powered virtual reality headset Oculus Rift has December 2012 targeted, and the Android-powered cube Ouya is scheduled for March 2013.

How Gesture Control Could Transform Video Games

Gaming has been looking a little different lately. People are punching in

the air at their TVs and tilting their tablets back and forth during their morning bus commute. They're playing motion-controlled game systems, which use depth cameras, accelerometers and other sensors to detect movements beyond the button-pushing that traditional video game controllers require.

Some researchers here at SIGGRAPH, a conference about interactive technologies hosted by the Association for Computing Machinery, think such motion-controlled systems are the future of gaming and other industries, too, offering a more intuitive way to play games, learn certain skills and more. "I think 10 years from now, it's going to seem antique to have a game that doesn't have some kind of natural user control, whether it's voice or motion," said Joseph LaViola, a computer scientist at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

At the conference Aug. 5, LaViola and four other motion control researchers offered a glimpse of what that future might look like. They looked at several ways the field may grow, what still needs to improve and whether motion control will one day supplant handheld devices.

The best days for motion control may still be ahead. Motion control may work best with entirely new technologies that aren't necessarily like the video games of today, two panelists said.

Motion control may find its way into the TVs, computers and other control screens of the future, said one panelist, Keith Steury, a psychologist who leads game design research at Microsoft Game Studios. The technology will be especially helpful for controlling 3D interfaces and "television screens the size of an entire wall in your home," he said. With such screens, a remote control might feel too small and limited, he explained.

Meanwhile, the best video games will be designed with the technology in mind, said Richard Marks, senior scientist in Sony's video game research and development department. Simply adding motion control to existing games that were made for traditional controllers doesn't work as well, he said.

Steury agreed. "I think the content that will take off is content that comes from a very different direction," he said.

While many of the audience members at the SIGGRAPH panel were gaming enthusiasts, even those less attuned to the video gaming world may see motion control in their schools, workplaces or doctor's offices. LaViola studies video games for training soldiers and teaching physics. One audience member said he develops motion control programs for physical therapists to use with their patients.

Whether entertainment, healthcare, the military or another industry will develop motion control the fastest depends on which industry is able to see the biggest potential profits, Steury and Brian Murphy, design lead at Microsoft Game Studios, said in response to a question from InnovationNewsDaily.

The motion-sensing device Kinect has shown Microsoft that there's money to be made in gaming. "So the investment there is obvious," Murphy said.

At the same time, specialty applications can charge their customers much more than Sony or Microsoft can charge people who buy video games, Steury said. A hospital may be willing to pay thousands of dollars for a motion-controlled physical therapy aid, for example, he said. So specialty companies' motion control technology may be several years ahead of the gaming industry's technology.

The motion-detecting controllers of today aren’t quite ready for that future yet, however. The Microsoft Kinect, Sony Playstation Move, Nintendo Wii and other motion-controlled systems are still less accurate and have a longer lag time than systems that use traditional controllers.

Panelist Amir Rubin, CEO of Sixense Entertainment, talked about the technical specs that motion control still needs to improve on. Motion controllers should work without a calibrating step, he said, and they should be able to detect several people in a wide area in front of the TV screen, so people can move around without worrying about leaving the "sight" of the controller. They should also be more precise, work without lag and be easy for developers to write games for, he said.

Such improvements may help spread motion controllers among more hardcore gamers, LaViola said. Motion control games have come under fire from some more dedicated video game fans, including Stephen Totilo, editor-in-chief of the gaming news website Kotaku. In July, Totilo published an editorial arguing that the best video games still use traditional controllers. Because people can’t control their movements in a video game as precisely using motion control, the technology might be best for young kids and for friends playing together at a party, who might be a little intoxicated, he wrote.

"Maybe in five years, we’ll be able to see some of these motion-controlled games be more applicable and more appropriate for the hardcore gaming market," LaViola said.

As motion control improves, will future games eschew handheld controllers entirely in favor of jumping, pointing and arm-flapping? "I don’t think that’s the right question, really," Marks said. Instead, he said, people should think about what kind of games they’re making.

While some games will work well when entirely motion-controlled, others might benefit from a handheld device, he said. It might be fun to hold a plastic sword during a sword-fighting game, for example, or a baton that appears to be magic wand on-screen. "A magic wand feels good to hold in your hand," he said.

Steury thinks some technologies we have today may also have arrived at the best way to do what they do. For the TV screens of today, for example, he thinks the traditional remote control works well and won’t be supplanted by simply pointing a finger.

Rubin disagreed, believing that motion control will replace traditional TV remotes. "It’s the most natural evolution of things," he said.

Whether or not motion control is the future for every device, most of the panelists expect it to have an increasing role in their industry in the next five years. "It’ll be a seamless part of what we do," Marks said.

Australian Police Chief Attacks Violent Video Games

One of Australia’s top police officers on Monday criticised violent video games that glorify rape and murder, after a spate of high-profile knifings by young people.

Andrew Scipione, the police commissioner for the state of New South Wales, said the violence adolescents were exposed to via films and console games only needed to affect a small minority of disturbed people.

"How can it not affect you if you're a young adolescent growing up in an era where to be violent is almost praiseworthy, where you engage in virtual crime on a daily basis," he told Sydney's Daily Telegraph.

"You get rewarded for killing people, raping women, stealing money from prostitutes, driving cars crashing and killing people."

The police commissioner said he was concerned that brutal games may encourage some people to re-enact the screen violence.

"That's not going to affect the vast majority but it's only got to affect one or two and what have you got?" he said.

"You've got some potentially really disturbed young person out there who's got access to weapons like knives or is good with the fist, can go out there and almost live that life now in the streets of modern Australia."

Scipione's comments came after three teenagers were stabbed in separate attacks in western Sydney in one week last month, which followed a 22-year-old apprentice chef being fatally knifed on July 8.

They came in the wake of an 18-year-old being fatally punched in Sydney's notorious Kings Cross area the same month, a crime that sent shockwaves through the city and put pressure on police to curb youth violence.

"The thing that's concerning me is the prevalence of people who are at this stage not just prepared to carry a knife, but prepared to use it," the police commissioner said.

"That has increased significantly."

But Jeffrey Brand, an academic who has studied the impact of games, said several major studies found there was no conclusive proof that they made people more violent.

Brand, an associate professor in communication and media at Bond University in Queensland, said most people in Australia played computer games.

"If Commissioner Scipione is part of the one third of Australians that don't play video games it may be useful for him to get to know them before making those claims," he told the news.com.au website.

"Because it might help the police in their work to better understand the medium or dismiss it as potential cause of violence."

In 2010, the Australian government released a report which found links between violent video games and significant harmful affects had not been persuasively proven or disproven.

Ohio Teen Collapses after 4-day Xbox Marathon

A four-day Xbox gaming marathon apparently was too much for one

15-year-old Ohio boy.

WCMH-TV reports that the Columbus teen collapsed and was hospitalized Tuesday after becoming severely dehydrated. His mother says he emerged from his bedroom during the four days only to pick up snacks or take a quick shower.

The boy was so engrossed in playing Modern Warfare 3 on Xbox that he made himself sick.

He’s expected to be OK but his mom has taken away the Xbox.

Dr. Mike Patrick, an emergency physician at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, recommended that gamers use some common sense: Get plenty of food and fluids, take breaks for physical activity and get some sleep.

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
"""""""""""""""""""""

The Atari 2600 at 40

Kids these days with their high-definition monitors and crisp computer graphics would probably sneer at the 8-bit technology that Atari used to rule the video game domain in the 1980s.

Last week marked the 40th anniversary of the company s gaming system that led to today s multi-billion-dollar gaming industry and it all started with two blips banging another blip back and forth on a screen.

Atari is what our entire industry is based off of, said Pat Ryan of G2K Games, a multi-state chain of video game and media stores that occasionally sees the Atari Video Computer System or Atari 2600 game consoles come across their counter for a trade-in once the owner brushes off the dust after a decade or two in the storage unit or basement.

It started it all. They knew that the (video game) industry was getting ready to take off with the success of Pong. There was not immediate success, but a competitor, Fairchild, saw the games as a fad, so they stepped to the side, leaving the market to Atari.

In Christmas of 1980, the Atari system was the biggest selling toy of that season with millions of consoles being sold. That changed everything. They were simple computer programs put onto a cartridge that were mass produced. The excess eventually caught up to them, but it had quite a run. Fourteen years, in fact, as a top seller.

Pong, a tennis-type game with paddle controllers that plugged into television sets, was the first of what was to become video games, although Atari founders Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney did create a game in 1971 called Spacewar! that did not sell very well.

In fact, Atari rolled out game after game and achieved monetary success long after Bushnell left the company in 1978, according to Time magazine s Techland blog.

Ryan also noted the Magnavox Odyssey, another home game console, launched in 1972. Although rare, they still see some for sale on Internet selling sites.

The late Steve Jobs, Apple computer founder, got his start at Atari as a technician in 1974 after dropping out of college.

Games that used to sell for $20 and $30 apiece now line shelves in the Kingsport store at nowhere near those prices, competing against the technology of today like Microsoft s XBox 360 and Nintendo s Wii both with processors and capabilities that video game players and developers could only dream about 40 years ago.

If people are looking for Ataris or the games for them these days, it is strictly for nostalgia to remind them of their childhood or high school years, Ryan said.

You still have fans who appreciate the era. You appreciate what it was like back then. In fact, most of those games can be downloaded onto an iPad or even your smartphone now. But some still want the original cartridge and are collecting hard-to-find titles or games.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FTC Finalizes Privacy Settlement with Facebook

The Federal Trade Commission voted Friday to finalize its settlement with Facebook, resolving charges that the social network exposed details about users’ lives without getting the required legal consent.

Facebook Inc. didn’t admit wrongdoing, but agreed to submit to government audits of its privacy practices every other year for the next two decades. The company also committed to getting explicit approval from users before changing the types of content it makes public.

The settlement, announced in November, is similar to agreements the FTC reached separately with Google Inc. and Myspace.

The FTC approved the settlement Friday after a public comment period. It came a day after the FTC fined Google $22.5 million to resolve allegations that Google didn’t comply with the earlier settlement.

Both Facebook and Google have vast amounts of data on their users Facebook through the things people share on the site, and Google through the searches and other things people do. Such information is valuable

because it can be used to improve the lucrative targeted advertising pitches that both companies aim at users.

Over the years, Facebook has been pushing users to voluntary share more about themselves. That ultimately encourages users and their friends to spend more time on the site, which in turn allows Facebook to sell more ads. Although Facebook boasts that it gives users a variety of software settings so they can decide which photos, links and updates to share with whom, the company changes those options on a regular basis.

Much of the FTC's complaint against Facebook centers on a series of changes that the company made to its privacy controls in late 2009. The revisions automatically shared information and pictures about Facebook users, even if they previously programmed their privacy settings to shield the content. Among other things, people's profile pictures, lists of online friends and political views were suddenly available for the world to see, the FTC alleged.

The complaint also charges that Facebook shared its users' personal information with third-party advertisers from September 2008 through May 2010 despite several public assurances from company officials that it wasn't passing the data along for marketing purposes.

Facebook believes that happened only in limited instances, generally when users clicked on ads that appeared on their personal profile pages. Most of Facebook's users click on ads when they are on their "Wall" a section that highlights their friends' posts or while visiting someone else's profile page.

Under the settlement, Facebook must get explicit consent a process known as "opting in" before making changes that override existing privacy preferences. The company also may not make misrepresentations about the privacy or security of users' personal information a broad clause that led to Google's fine on Thursday.

Violations will be subject to civil penalties of up to $16,000 per day for each infringement.

The FTC approved the settlement 3-1, with one commissioner not participating. Commissioner J. Thomas Rosch dissented, as he did with the Google deal on Thursday, partly because it didn't require an admission of wrongdoing. He also worried the settlement was too vague on whether it applied to Facebook apps written by outside parties. The three commissioners who approved the deal believe it covers apps.

Facebook had no comment beyond a statement that it is pleased the settlement received final approval.

Google Fined $22.5 Million for Latest Privacy Breakdown

Google is paying a $22.5 million fine to settle the latest regulatory case questioning the Internet search leader's respect for people's privacy and the integrity of its internal controls.

The penalty announced Thursday by the Federal Trade Commission matches the figure reported by The Associated Press and other media outlets last month. It's the most that the FTC has ever fined a company for a civil violation.

The rebuke resolves the FTC’s allegations that Google Inc. duped millions of Web surfers who use Apple Inc.’s Safari browser.

Google had assured people that it wouldn’t monitor their online activities, as long as they didn’t change the browser settings to permit the tracking.

Google broke that promise, according to the FTC, by creating a technological loophole that enabled the company’s DoubleClick advertising network to shadow unwitting Safari users. That tracking gave DoubleClick a better handle on what kinds of marketing pitches to show them.

The FTC concluded that the contradiction between Google’s stealth tracking and its privacy assurances to Safari users violated a vow that the company made in another settlement with the agency in October.

The latest settlement doesn’t affect a separate FTC inquiry over whether Google has been abusing its dominant position in Internet search to highlight its own services over rivals and drive up online advertising prices. The settlement also doesn’t come with any admission from Google of wrongdoing.

The company has acknowledged that DoubleClick was tracking Safari users, but insists the monitoring wasn’t by design.

All Google wanted to do, according to the company, was create a way for Safari users to press on a button to signal they recommended an ad. Google said it didn’t realize its tinkering altered Safari’s automatic privacy settings in a way that allowed for broader surveillance.

After the circumvention was publicized in February by a graduate student at Stanford University, Google stopped the tracking on Safari. The company says it never collected any personal information.

"We set the highest standards of privacy and security for our users," Google said Thursday.

Google’s actions, though, have cast doubts about the sincerity of its commitment.

The Safari intrusion is the latest privacy stumble at Google, whose dominant Internet search engine and popular email service provide valuable peepholes into people’s minds.

In 2010, Google set up a social networking service called Buzz that exposed people’s email contacts. Following an FTC investigation, Google agreed to 20 years of oversight and a pledge not to mislead consumers about privacy issues. That’s the pledge that the FTC says Google broke with Safari.

Google also got in trouble for collecting personal data transmitted over unprotected Wi-Fi networks as Google cars cruised neighborhoods around the world taking pictures for the company’s online mapping service.

The FTC didn’t take action against Google for scooping up the Wi-Fi data, although the Federal Communications Commission fined the company $25,000 earlier this year for impeding its investigation into the matter.

As it did with the secret tracking on Safari, Google has framed those

privacy breaches as inadvertent slips.

That defense is wearing thin, according to David Vladeck, the director of the FTC's bureau of consumer protection.

"In some ways, as a regulator, it's hard to know which answer is worst: 'I didn't know' or 'I did it deliberately.' Both are bad," Vladeck told reporters on a Thursday conference call.

The FTC hopes the fine will force Google to pay better attention to its practices.

"It's a big company," Vladeck said. "It's grown very quickly, but the social contract is if you are going to hold on to people's most private data, you have got to do a better job of honoring your privacy commitment."

Those terse remarks underscore Google's increasingly tense relationship with regulators around the world. Both the FTC and the European Commission are engaged in broad antitrust investigations of Google. The company, which is based in Mountain View, Calif., has submitted a list of concessions in an attempt to settle Europe's probe, while the FTC's inquiry remains open.

Although the $22.5 million fine is a record for the FTC, it won't leave much of a financial dent at Google. The company had $43 billion in cash at the end of June and generates $22.5 million in revenue roughly every four hours.

"This record fine will send a signal to a lot of Internet companies, but there's still some question whether the FTC has the authority and resources to rein in an entity as big and powerful as Google," said Carl Tobias, a Richmond University law professor who followed the Safari case.

Bad publicity may be the bigger blow for Google, which takes so much pride in its scruples that it has adopted "Don't Be Evil" as its corporate motto.

"This has to sting. They don't want to lose too much goodwill," said Justin Brookman, director of consumer privacy for the Center for Democracy & Technology.

The FTC's willingness to settle with Google without an admission of wrongdoing troubled one of the agency's own commissioners, J. Thomas Rosch. He voted against the settlement because he didn't believe the agreement was in the public interest without Google admitting liability.

But the FTC's four other commissioners voted in favor of the settlement.

"We don't get anything out of an admission other than a good headline," Vladeck said. "It is not of any practical value to us."

The fine surpasses a nearly $19 million penalty that the FTC slapped in 2010 on a telemarketer accused of duping people into believing they were donating to charities.

Without providing specifics, the FTC said the Google fine represents several times more than what Google made from the targeted ads that it distributed through Safari.

Consumer Watchdog, a California group that has emerged among Google's most strident critics, said it may challenge the settlement unless Google admits it broke the privacy promise made with the Buzz settlement.

"The commission has allowed Google to buy its way out of trouble for an amount that probably is less than the company spends on lunches for its employees and with no admission it did anything wrong," Consumer Watchdog complained.

News of the FTC's fine didn't faze investors as Google shares added 12 cents to close Thursday at $642.35. Although it was modest, the gain was still enough to boost Google's market value by about $39 million, nearly twice the amount of the fine.

HP To Take Record Quarterly Loss

Hewlett-Packard Co. on Wednesday said that it will take a massive charge against its earnings for the latest quarter, leading to a record loss of nearly $9 billion.

The charge is the result of a writedown of the value of its services business, reflecting that the company overpaid for when it bought Electronic Data Systems in 2008 for $14 billion.

HP said it will take an $8 billion charge for the reduced value of Enterprise Services in the quarter that ended in July. The division, which provides information technology and outsourcing services to corporations, has seen flat revenue for the last two years, and its operating profit has declined.

The Palo Alto, Calif. company said the charge and other accounting adjustments will lead to a loss of $4.31 to $4.49 per share. That works out to about $8.5 billion to $8.9 billion.

In the last 15 years, HP has only posted one quarterly loss.

The charge comes as CEO Meg Whitman is trying to turn HP around. The company's main businesses, PCs, services and printers, are stagnant or shrinking. Whitman, the former CEO of eBay, took over in September.

It also said its early retirement program is meeting with unexpectedly high acceptance, meaning it will take a charge of $1.5 billion to $1.7 billion for severance payments in the third quarter, rather than the $1 billion it expected.

The restructuring, announced in May, is expected to slash 27,000 jobs, or 8 percent of HP's work force, by 2014. It's the largest downsizing in the company's history.

Excluding charges, HP said it expects to report fiscal third-quarter earnings of $1 per share, up from a previous range of 94 cents to 97 cents. Analysts expected earnings of 97 cents per share, according to a poll by FactSet.

The computer company also said the head of Enterprise Services, its second-largest division, is leaving "to pursue other interests." John Visentin will be replaced on an interim basis by Mike Nefkens, currently

the head of Enterprise Services in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

HP appointed Visentin to head Enterprise Services last August, after leading the Americas division. Before that, he worked at IBM.

HP's stock rose 54 cents, or 2.8 percent, to $19.50 in midday trading. The shares are close to their lowest level in eight years.

HP is set to report third-quarter financial results on Aug. 22.

New Computer Virus Prowling Mideast

A new computer virus tied to some of the most sophisticated cyberweapons thus-far discovered has been found circulating in the Middle East, a Moscow-based computer security company said Thursday. If a link were confirmed, the find would expand the electronic arsenal reportedly deployed by the U.S. and Israel against their rivals in the region.

Kaspersky Lab ZAO said in a statement that the new virus, dubbed "Gauss," was aimed at stealing financial information from customers of a series of Lebanese banks.

The firm said that similarities in coding, structure, and operation meant it could say "with a high degree of certainty" that Gauss was related to "Flame," a sophisticated piece of spyware which prompted an Internet blackout across Iran's oil industry in April, and to "Stuxnet," an infrastructure-wrecking worm whose discovery revolutionized the cybersecurity field.

The statement acknowledged that much remained unclear about the virus's capabilities including its ultimate purpose. Kaspersky said that the virus's command-and-control servers were shut down last month, meaning that, for the time being, "the malware is in a dormant state."

Kaspersky outlined several similarities which Gauss shared with Flame, a program which was recently-discovered vacuuming information from computers in Iran. So powerful was the spyware that in late April Iranian officials briefly disconnected the entire country's oil industry including the Oil Ministry, energy rigs, and the strategic Khark Island oil terminal in a bid to contain Flame's data theft.

Flame in turn has been linked to Stuxnet, an ambitious program aimed at sabotaging uranium enrichment at Iranian nuclear facilities. Stuxnet's discovery in 2010 was of particular interest to cybersecurity professionals because it interfered with the action of German-made centrifuges the most high-profile example to date of a computer virus causing physical havoc at an industrial facility.

Recent reports in The New York Times and The Washington Post have tied both Flame and Stuxnet to a secret U.S.-Israeli program aimed at destabilizing Iran's atomic energy program, which many Western countries believe is a cover for the development of nuclear weapons.

It isn't exactly clear how Gauss would fit in to such a program, and Kaspersky acknowledged that stealing money from banks didn't seem like an activity state-backed actors were likely to be engaged in.

Other anti-virus firms were still digesting Gauss's code Thursday.

"People are definitely getting excited about it because of the supposed connection to Flame and Stuxnet," Chris Astacio, of San Diego-based Websense, said in telephone interview. "But without looking at the binary (the raw code of the virus) we can't really comment."

Kaspersky said it was working with the International Telecommunication Union to notify those affected by the infection.

A call and an email to the Geneva-based organization were not immediately returned.

Redesigned iMac and Mac Pro Reportedly in the Works

Hidden configuration files found in Boot Camp Assistant suggest Apple may be readying a redesign for its iMac and Mac Pro line of computers, according to AppleInsider. The files contain information that lets the software know what Mac models can install a second operating system from a USB flash drive. While the list includes the existing MacBook Pro and MacBook Air computers, it also includes two new Mac models that have not been release yet the sixth-generation Mac Pro and the thirteenth-generation iMac. AppleInsider speculates that Apple s latest desktop computers may omit optical drives after looking at the data the website notes that while Boot Camp s list includes models with optical drives, most of the Macs in the supported list do not have physical media drives.

Facebook Argues "Like" Is Free Speech

Facebook users might want to be more careful about who and what they designate as a "Like" on the social networking site. As one deputy sheriff in Virginia found out, putting all your Like behind the wrong person could cost you your job.

During a 2009 election, the deputy and some co-workers "Liked" the guy running against their boss for sheriff of Hampton, Va. Well, the incumbent won and promptly canned all of those who committing this egregious Facebook faux pas.

The deputy sued to get his job back, but the courts ruled that clicking on the "Like" button is not protected free speech. Now Facebook and the ACLU are stepping in to argue that "Liking" a political candidate is a verbal and a symbolic expression of support worthy of constitutional protection.

Obviously, neither James Madison nor Alexander Hamilton could be reached for comment. They might have difficulty recognizing the country they helped forge more than 200 years ago still they probably would agree this case presents an interesting precedent regarding how the U.S. legal system recognizes social networking in the future.

Papa John's Obamacare Stance Spurs Social Media Attack

A couple of weeks after the brouhaha over Chick-fil-A's CEO's comments about same-sex marriage prompted a national debate reflected in social media, another fast-food chain, Papa John's, has dipped its toe in the red state/blue state divide.

During a conference call with analysts last week, Papa John's CEO John Schnatter said that Obamacare would raise the price of a pizza somewhere between $0.11 to $0.14. "We're not supportive of Obamacare, like most businesses in our industry," Schnatter said, according to Politico. "But our business model and unit economics are about as ideal as you can get for a food company to absorb Obamacare...If Obamacare is in fact not repealed, we will find tactics to shallow out any Obamacare costs and core strategies to pass that cost onto consumers in order to protect our shareholders' best interests."

Reports of Schnatter's comments led to the now-predictable outcry on Twitter and Facebook. On Twitter, while some are calling for a boycott, others took the opportunity to trash the chain. "Ok then, raise the price of your garbage pizza," tweeted Bob del Grosso. "Anything that creates an economic disincentive to buy Papa John's 'pizza' is a good thing. Yay Obamacare!" tweeted another critic, author Baratunde Thurston. Meanwhile, as was the case with Chick-fil-A, conservative-leaning Twitter users showed their support. For instance, the Young America Foundation called Schnatter's comments "delicious free speech."

On average, response to the brand on social media has been negative, according to NetBase, an analytics firm. NetBase looked at social media discussion about Papa John's over the past week and found it drifted into negative territory in the first week of August. On July 29, talk about the brand was 77% positive and 23% negative, but by Aug. 5, the discussion was 48% positive and 52% negative, according to the researcher.

Meanwhile, another researcher, YouGov's BrandIndex, found Papa John's Buzz Score - which is calculated by averaging negative and positive feedback, fell from a stellar 100 on Aug. 1 (meaning all consumers interviewed online at the time had reported they'd only heard positive things about the brand) to a current 49.

For comparison's sake, here's a chart from YouGov showing Chick-fil-A's Buzz Score before and after company President Dan Cathy's comments about same-sex marriage were picked up by the mainstream media.

As Chick-fil-A did, Papa John's has attempted to counter the negative buzz via a Facebook post. The company posted a message on Wednesday attempting to clarify its stance on the issue:

> There's been a lot of buzz about some comments made recently by our founder regarding the potential impact of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act on our business. We certainly understand the importance of healthcare to our customers, our employees, small business owners and their employees.
>
> "As a publicly traded company, we were responding to a direct question from an analyst on our quarterly financial conference call about the anticipated costs of complying with the Act. When certain business costs increase such as fuel, ingredients or employee healthcare there is naturally an impact to the price of products and services.

The vast majority of Papa John’s restaurants are owned by small business people, each of whom will be impacted in different ways by costs associated with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Papa John s remains fully committed to providing our customers with better ingredients and better pizza at the best value."

So far, the post has gotten more than 900 likes and more than 1,300 comments, many of them negative.

What do you think? Do you like to keep your pizza and politics separate?

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.